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Farshid Emami, “Coffeehouses, Urban Spaces, and the Formation of a Public Sphere in Safavid Isfahan”

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REFERENCES

Farshid Emami, "Coffeehouses, Urban Spaces, and the Formation of a Public Sphere in Safavid Isfahan", *Muqarnas*, XXXIII (2016), p. 177-220.

- 1 In this paper Farshid Emami examines the development of coffeehouses in Safavid Isfahan against the background of increased exchanges of goods in the early modern world.
- 2 He studies their architectural forms and integration in the newly built urban spaces and also their nature as new public meeting spaces. He relies on investigations of physical remnants of coffeehouses in situ, visual material (architectural drawings and 19th century photographs) and textual sources (court chronicles, biographical dictionaries, literary works and western travel narratives).
- 3 The main focus lies on two series of coffeehouses, which were an integrated part of the building programs of Shah 'Abbas: firstly, two pairs of coffeehouses that were built in the northern part of the Chaharbagh promenade and secondly, a complex of six coffeehouses that was built at the northeastern side of the Maydan-i Naqsh-Jahan. The author paints a clear and vivid image of their architectural forms and constructions, the dynamic relation with their environment and the public and social life that took place in and around them.
- 4 In addition, Emami discusses coffeehouses in other neighborhoods of Isfahan, such as those of the Takhtgah neighborhood near the Old Maydan, and in provincial cities.

- 5 In discussing the social aspects, it appears that the new habit of drinking coffee and smoking tobacco in the coffeehouses of "new Isfahan" was mainly adopted by the elite of the Safavid society, whereas the coffeehouses in the "old city" had another character and housed a more varied audience.
 - 6 In another section, the author pays attention to Isfahan's coffeehouses as places for literary gatherings, artists, artisans, poets and storytellers and as hubs for cultural exchange. Also the penetration of coffee-related imagery in Safavid literature and visual arts is discussed.
 - 7 Finally Emami deals with the "subversive" character of Isfahan's coffeehouses. They are described as places where news was exchanged, politics were discussed and the government could be criticized. Shah 'Abbas, who visited the coffeehouses himself for entertainment and to represented himself as a visible ruler, started to take measures by ordering the presence of a mullah in the coffeehouses as a means of control.
 - 8 With this contribution, Emami filled a gap in our knowledge of the architectural, urban and social features of Safavid Isfahan.
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